

Walpole Historical Commission



Samuel D. Obar, Chair
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About Us

- Established by Selectmen in 1970, and sanctioned by Mass. General Laws, is the official advocate for the preservation, protection and development of the Town of Walpole's historical and archaeological assets
- Primary function is to oversee the execution of Chapter 349 of the Town of Walpole Bylaws (Demolition Delay Bylaw), which requires that the Commission have input in the demolition of any structure in town that is more than 100 years old
- Often confused with the Historical Society, which is a non-governmental non-profit (headquarters at Deacon Willard Lewis House on town common)

2017 Year in Review

- 14 meetings + 5 site visits
- The Commission reviewed five demolition applications:
 - 1641 Washington Street – voted not “historically significant,” has been torn down
 - 388 North Street, voted not “historically significant”, still standing
 - 234 Stone Street, voted not “historically significant,” has been torn down
 - 1350 North Street, voted “historically significant” and “preferably preserved,” six-month delay in effect to 6/18
 - 767 & 777 East Street (Walpole Outdoors), voted “historically significant”
- Barn Survey to document all current barns in the town of Walpole
- Old Town Hall Reuse Committee

2018 Major Goals

- Make updates to the Demolition Delay Bylaw at Spring 2018 Town Meeting
- Increase the Commission's membership
- Bring Barn Survey to a successful conclusion
- Obtain funding for a permanent part-time secretary (\$1,291.00)
- Start planning for Walpole Tri-centennial (2024, just 6 years from now)
- Continue involvement with Old Town Hall Reuse Committee to ensure the building's permanent preservation and rehabilitation
- Install National Register of Historic Places plaque at Union Station and hold a ceremony for unveiling
- Identify and begin process to put local building, or district, on the National Register of Historic Places

Worth Noting

- The Commission lacks secretarial support and this is now the third year in a row that the Commission is seeking funding for a part-time secretary; the previous secretary retired in 2015, after which our personnel line item was cut to zero
- We are the only town board with responsibility over a town bylaw that does not have secretarial support. This poses potential concerns with accurate record-keeping and public records archiving.
- We had favorable conversations with the Town Administrator and Finance Committee on this issue last year but still did not receive funding (approximately \$1,291.00). We are hoping to continue to work with them on this issue in the coming year.

Demolition Delay Bylaw

- Enacted in Walpole in 1973, last updated 2005 (minor updates)
- Currently in place in 150 communities across the Commonwealth
- Walpole Historical Commission reviews any demolition application for houses more than 100 years old and, if the house is deemed historically or architecturally significant, the Commission may impose a delay of up to six months on the demolition. After the delay period ends, the applicant may proceed to demolish the structure.
- Purpose of the delay period is to give the applicant and Commission an opportunity to explore alternatives to demolition, that involve preservation and rehabilitation of the structure. If the Commission is satisfied that the structure is unlikely to be preserved or rehabilitated, they may vote to end the delay period prior to the six months expiring.



234 Stone Street (1900) – deemed not “historically significant” - now demolished



1350 North Street (1745) – Demolition Delay in effect



777 East Street (Melzar Allen house) (1840) – Demolition Delay in effect

Proposed Demolition Delay Bylaw Changes

- In Section 2 (Definitions), add certain definitions for terms that are included in the bylaw but not already defined.
- Change the title of “Building Inspector” to “Building Commissioner” to reflect the new job title since the bylaw was updated.
- Eliminate superfluous language in various parts of the bylaw and fix a typographical error.
- Add language that gives the Commission and a demolition permit applicant more flexibility to extend the time required to respond to applications, by allowing the Commission and applicant to jointly agree to extend the time requirement.
- Extend the demolition delay for historic buildings from six months to twelve months based on the recommendation of the Mass. Historical Commission, and also to reflect input we have received from citizens over the past several years.
- Add language that allows the Commission to adopt any rules and regulations necessary to administer the bylaw or delegate authority to make initial determinations of historical significance, and adopt a schedule of reasonable fees to cover the costs associated with the administration of this bylaw, based on language from the Mass. Historical Commission’s model bylaw.
- Replace the language in the “Enforcement” section with language from the Mass. Historical Commission’s model bylaw. This language makes few substantive changes other than clearly specifies the fine for failure to comply with the bylaw.